

Issue brief: Nation's drug-related overdose and death epidemic continues to worsen

July 2022

The nation's drug overdose epidemic continues to change and become worse. The epidemic affects every state and now is driven by illicit fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, methamphetamine, and cocaine, often in combination or in adulterated forms. More than 107,000 deaths were [reported](#) in the United States between December 2020 to December 2021. The AMA continues to urge policymakers' action to increase access to evidence-based care for substance use disorders, pain and harm reduction measures. The news articles and reports below cite data from multiple and varied sources, including national, state and local public health agencies, law enforcement, emergency medical services, hospitals, treatment centers, and journals. Recent AMA advocacy, resources and recommendations to end the epidemic:

- [AMA-Manatt Health 2022 state policy toolkit](#) provides more than 400 specific laws, regulations, policy guidance and other actions being implemented to help reduce mortality and improve outcomes. The toolkit builds on the 2020 [AMA-Manatt Health national policy roadmap](#) use of best practices to increase access to evidence-based care for mental illness, substance use disorders, comprehensive pain care and harm reduction initiatives.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on February 10, 2022, released a draft revision to its 2016 opioid prescribing guideline. In comments to the Federal Register on April 11, 2022, [the AMA said](#) that the CDC's new draft guideline—if followed by policymakers, health insurance companies and pharmacy chains—provides a path to remove arbitrary prescribing thresholds, restore balance and support comprehensive, compassionate care.
- [AMA letter urging Congress](#) to hold health plans accountable for nearly 15 years of failures in complying with the 2008 Mental Health Parity And Equity Addiction Act.
- [AMA comments on Biden Administration's 2022 National Drug Control Strategy](#). Reduce barriers to medications to treat substance use disorders; broaden access to a wide range of harm reduction services, including naloxone, sterile needle and syringe exchange services, and drug checking supplies; require all health insurance programs to remove arbitrary restrictions for care for patients with pain; and take steps to develop and support a national, standardized reporting system for key metrics related to drug use. July 2021.
- [Recommendations from the AMA Substance Use and Pain Care Task Force](#) and [AMA 2021 Overdose Epidemic national report](#) Updated recommendations that highlight physicians' actions as well as additional steps that must be taken to have a meaningful impact on reducing drug-related mortality and improving patient outcomes. September 2021
- AMA issue brief on [key considerations for employers during the drug overdose epidemic](#). This includes reviewing benefit plans for patients and families with substance use disorders, mental illness and/or pain; promoting harm reduction at work; and reducing stigma.
- Additional AMA resources:
 - [America's drug overdose epidemic: Select 2020-2022 research](#)
 - [Issue brief: Reports of efforts to help the nation's overdose epidemic](#)
 - [Issue brief: Nation's drug-related overdose and death epidemic continues to worsen](#)

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